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STANFIELD HALL.

By J. F. SMITH,

Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.



Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.
AND OTHER EMINENT ARTISTS.

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This image shows a blank, aged, cream-colored page, likely an endpaper or flyleaf of a book. The paper has a slightly textured appearance with some minor discoloration and faint smudges. A small, dark, irregular stain is visible near the top right corner. The overall tone is a warm, off-white or light beige.

VOL. III.



[THE ESCAPE PREVENTED.]

STANFIELD HALL.

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CHAPTER XIII.

ON the 23rd of July the final propositions of Parliament were presented to the king at Newcastle by the Earl of Pembroke, the Earl of Denbigh, and Lord Montague, on the part of the Peers, and by six members of the House of Commons—the commissioners of the Scottish Parliament, who were present, consenting to them. These nobles and gentlemen, who sincerely desired peace, humbly entreated Charles to consent to them; but he, emboldened by the division which was daily taking place between the Presbyterians and Independents, daily took exceptions to some particulars, whereby the affairs of the kingdom were retarded. It is supposed he was induced to act thus by the secret representations of Lord Digby, who flattered him with hopes that the former party, alarmed at the increasing preponderance of their rivals, would declare for him. Perhaps the most destructive act of their policy was the indiscreet zeal with which they hastened the departure of the Scottish army from the kingdom, it being of the same religious views as themselves.

Many men who did not love the king personally, but who loved monarchy, implored him to accept the propositions as the only means of saving the throne; others used prayers, mingled with threats. The Earls of Argyll and Lauder besought him on their knees, but all in vain. The latter, who was Chancellor of Scotland, told him plainly that his assent was necessary to the preservation of his crown and kingdom, and that the danger of his refusal would be without remedy. "The Parliament," he urged, "are in possession of your navy and army, and all the towns, castles, and forts in England." Still Charles refused to sign; a veil of mental darkness seemed to have obscured his understanding.

In the course of the debates in the House a Presbyterian member exclaimed:

"What will become of us now the king has refused to accept the terms proposed?"

"What would have become of *us*," demanded one of the Independents, "if he had accepted them?"

The last act of blind confidence in his resources and prospects set the seal upon his doom. Henceforth he walked beneath the shadow of the headsman's axe. The enemies of the monarchy triumphed. The royal captive was soon afterwards removed from Newcastle to Hollinby House—a stately old mansion in a pleasant country, at no great distance from the fatal field of Naseby—where he passed his time in reading, chess, playing at bowls, and walking.

At this time, triumphing in their success, the Presbyterian party had proclaimed the establishment of their own form of worship, to the exclusion of every other, and laboured hard to arrest the

many sects comprised under the general term of Independents. They had even determined to disband the victorious army and create a new one devoted to their party. But here they reckoned without sense or prudence ; for, secretly as the resolution was taken, it got wind. Ireton was one of the first who heard of it. The occasion was a good one for the furtherance of his long-cherished scheme of allying himself to the man whom he looked upon as the rising favourite of Fortune. Events soon afterwards proved that the rough soldier had made a shrewd calculation.

Cromwell was seated in his study reflecting on the various phases of his varied existence—his early struggles, dreams of ambition, hopes which promised so near a realisation—when a knock at the secret door startled him from his reverie. Opening the concealed door with the air of a man who welcomed the arrival of a long-expected visitor, a slight frown passed over his countenance, expressive of impatience, when he saw that it was Ireton.

"You seem more surprised than pleased to see me," exclaimed the rough soldier, as he carelessly threw his hat and sword upon the table and took a chair opposite his host ; "natheless, it is friendship brings me here to-night."

An almost imperceptible smile curled the lips of Cromwell at the word "friendship." He had mingled so much in the world, and possessed the intuitive faculty of reading character to so remarkable a degree, that a miser professing charity, or a drunkard's praise of sobriety, would not have astonished him more than the speaker's profession of friendship. It is strange how the study of humanity debases it in our judgment. We find the trail of the serpent over every flower of earth—they bloom not as in Eden.

"Humph ! you smile !"

"Ay !" said the master of the mansion, "as a man smiles when he sees spread before him the net which caught him when a child. Friendship !" he repeated grimly ; "take the ware to some other mart. I have cheapened the commodity too often not to know its selling price."

"I have a secret which concerns the safety of the cause in which we are both engaged."

"Name it."

Ireton hesitated ; he scarcely knew how to broach the affair nearest his heart—to ask the hand of the eldest daughter of his host, the gentle Bridget, as the price of his service. Not that he loved the maiden ; cruel, ambitious, or revengeful men may experience the passion, but never the sentiment of love—that is a blessing God seems to have denied to mere earthly natures as incompatible with its divine essence. His host perceived his embarrassment and inquired the cause.

"Come, man," he said, "we understand each other, and will not

chaffer, like two hucksters, about the price. Thy secret ! If it prove worth the telling, the service shall be paid."

"It concerns the very existence of the Independents as a party, and the triumph of our faith, since it touches the life of some who now hold their heads in the blind confidence of security."

"The reward will be the greater," was the cold reply.

"Hear me, then," said Ireton, lowering his voice to a whisper; "the Presbyterians and blind Royalists are leagued together to restore the king. As a first step, to-morrow it will be proposed in the Commons to disband the army—to raise a new one, to be officered solely by men devoted to their interests; and orders are already signed for the arrest of several of the true friends of the people—yourself amongst the number—and your committal to the Tower."

Cromwell started from his chair with the air of a lion who, while sleeping, has been wounded by the hunter's arrow. The intelligence was of a nature to rouse all his savage energy, for he well knew that the disbanding of the army was a step which, once achieved, would lead not only to the overthrow of the dreams of greatness in which he had been indulging, but the total defeat of the principles for which he had successfully fought and bled.

"The Tower !" he repeated. "Fools ! before to-morrow's noon they will require an army to consign me there. Is the arm that struck at Naseby paralysed ? Am I grown old or feeble from defeat ? Who is the leader of this devilish plot, which stifles the people in their sworn defenders, and England's liberties through her patriots' lives ?"

"Fairfax."

"The smooth-faced traitor ! Who next ?" demanded Cromwell.

"Stapleton, Hollis, and a dozen others. Now," added the informant, "have I not served the cause ?"

"Yes ; and though I cannot read thy heart to sift its motives, the service shall not go unrewarded. What is't thou seekest ?—gold ? I should have thought thee rich enough already."

"No," replied the soldier, affecting a contempt which he was far from feeling ; "it is not with the dross of earth, but with its fairest flower, my devotion to the cause must be repaid. I love thy daughter, the good, the gentle Bridget. Grant me her hand, and it shall be a solemn compact 'twixt us. I will prove as the shadow of thy sword in action, the reflex of thy mind in council, the minister of thy will in all things. Remember that my name, e'en now, stands with the army and the cause but second to your own."

The future Protector was startled at the request. Although to all outward appearance so cold, he was an affectionate father ; the peculiar tenets of the sect to which he was devoted suppressed all outward show of affection as a weakness unworthy of the men who

were chosen for the great work by the Lord. This unnatural restraint frequently served but to increase the force of feeling. As the stream too long dammed up at last flows over, so did the affections of the stern Independent's heart break through the artificial barriers which sometimes proved too weak to restrain them.

"What!" he exclaimed, "barter my child—coin my own blood—make of her innocence and young affection a thing of merchandise? for that is merchandise which may be bought for interest as well as gold. No, Ireton; I prize thee as a soldier in the field; thy sword hath done good office, for thou art not of those who are negligent when the good work is to be done; but I cannot force my child to be thy wife."

"Force!" replied his visitor; "small force were necessary, general. All do not think me the bull-headed soldier merely. Not to disguise a truth thou soon must learn, I have found favour in thy daughter's sight, and it is with her permission that I ask her hand."

Cromwell was thunderstruck. He had a high sense of parental authority, and the obedience which a parent had a right to exact from a child. Although no tyrant in his family, he expected to be consulted by them in all things; and that his eldest daughter should have given a word of promise or encouragement without his permission, vexed and hurt him sorely; but he felt that the present moment was the time for action, not words; and he was one of those whose energies never failed them at a crisis: danger seemed to arm his tongue with eloquence, and his heart with courage.

"We will speak of this anon. No more words," he added, as he saw that Ireton was about to urge his suit. "I have promised that we will speak of it, and that is much already. We must ride to-night. There is safety in darkness. We have a long journey before us. This is no time for wooing."

"A journey!" said the astonished Ireton. "Where to?"

"In forty hours I expect to check my rein upon the banks of Trent."

"To the army! the army! I see, I see!" exclaimed his visitor, struck with admiration at the promptitude of the decision by which the danger had been met. "There you will be in safety."

"More," said his leader, "their master; or if not that, in a position to treat as power with power. Fools! do they think the cobweb nets of their weak policy can bend the iron energies of men who have tried their strength on many a hard-fought field? The soldier's voice hath too long been mute in the councils of the nation. Is he less a citizen than the prating lawyer or the purse-proud trader? But these are mere words, and the time calls for action. Follow me," he added, "and as we ride press not thy suit again. Enough that I have listened to it without reproof."

Ireton knew the speaker's disposition so well that he felt convinced to urge him further at that moment would be to receive a refusal, which would at once destroy his hopes; for Cromwell was a man who seldom returned upon his resolutions after he had announced them. His weaknesses of purpose, the irresolutions which at times assailed him, were confined to his breast. To the world they were, at least for the present, a secret. Bowing his head in token of acquiescence, he followed his host in silence through the secret door into a small courtyard at the back of the house, from whence they passed into the stables, where two powerful horses stood ready saddled in their stalls.

"Mount," was the laconic order of their owner.

"Will you not first inform your family of your departure?" demanded Ireton, who hoped to obtain a sight of the fair Bridget, to inform her that he had spoken with her father. "Your absence may cause an unnecessary alarm."

"They are not so trained. They know," replied Cromwell, "that my life is in His hands, without whose permission not even a sparrow falls. Natheless," he added, resuming his soldier-like habit and tone, "we are not warranted in trifling with the means of safety. Look to your pistols, draw your sword-belt as you would buckle the resolution to you; no more words; on in silence."

On a motion of the speaker's hand the grey-headed old servitor opened the gate at the back of the stables, which was just large enough to admit the egress of a man on horseback, and carefully closed and barred it after them. As they passed Westminster Hall the House had just broken up, and they saw the members hurrying, some towards Charing Cross, others taking to their barges for the City. It was evident that something of unusual interest had occurred to agitate men's minds. They were in motion like a hive of bees which had been disturbed—restless, impatient, and passionate. Disputes rang upon the causeways, and the contention of the House was continued even in the streets.

Following the example of his leader, Ireton pulled his heavy beaver over his brow, and drew his weather-beaten cloak so as to disguise his person. Fortunately, the night was a dark one, and they passed through Charing and the City unperceived. The next day, when those who were intrusted with the order to arrest the great leader of the Independents made their appearance at his house, they found, to their chagrin, that the object of their pursuit had fled. Disguising the real object of their visit under a clumsy profession of courtesy, they retired to consult on some fresh scheme, doomed to be defeated like the first.

A few days afterwards it was resolved by Parliament to dismiss nearly the whole of the remaining army, to retain Sir Thomas Fairfax as commander-in-chief, to allow no other officer to retain a higher rank than that of colonel, and to exact from all of them

an oath to the Covenant and the Presbyterian Church by law established. Some of these votes were aimed at Oliver Cromwell; but they also excluded Ludlow, Ireton, Skippon, Blake, Algernon Sidney, and others. It was ordered that a large portion of the army should also be shipped for Ireland; and this they did without paying, or even talking of paying, any portion of the heavy arrears due to the soldiers. The men vowed that they would not go without their old officers—that they would not be put under new and untried ones—that they would not go to be destroyed, far from their homes, by famine and disease; and forthwith they broke up their cantonments round Nottingham, and marched towards London.

Then it was that the Presbyterians, in a panic, voted an assessment for paying the troops, but it was too late; Cromwell had been amongst them, and his fiery eloquence had so wrought upon their religious enthusiasm, that they refused. His words had fallen like a flame from a prophet's lips amongst them. On the intelligence of their march reaching the City, a petition was set on foot, and presented to the Commons, praying that the army might be removed further from London. It complained, also, bitterly of a counter-petition, set on foot by the Independents, and demanded the punishment of the authors of it.

The petition of the Independents was in all respects a remarkable document—the first and loudest call that had yet been made upon Republican principles. The majority of the House, recovering from their terror, voted that the petition should be condemned, and that the army should not approach within twenty-five miles of London. A deputation of members was sent down to Safron-Walden to treat with Fairfax and the officers.

On the day after their arrival, Fairfax summoned a convention of officers, who plainly told the commissioners of the Parliament that they had been ill-used, and would not submit to it; that they must have payment of the arrears already due, and some indemnity for their past sacrifices and services. In reporting their doings, or their non-doings, to the Commons, the commissioners mentioned a petition in progress in the army. In these stormy times late debates had become common. This night the House sat very late, and, "being grown thin with long sitting," the Presbyterians voted the petition of the army, which they had not seen, to be an improper petition; and further, that those of the army who continued in their distempered condition, and went on in advancing and promoting the petition, should be proceeded against as enemies to the State and disturbers of the public peace. On the morrow the Lords voted their adherence to the resolution. Fairfax remonstrated in a mild manner; but the army complained of the injustice of not being allowed to petition while the petitions against them were not suppressed, and the cavalry talked of drawing to a rendezvous to compose something for their vindication. On the 15th of April a

deputation from the two Houses again conferred with the army at Saffron Walden. Colonel Lambert, in the name of the rest, desired to know what satisfaction the Parliament had given to the queries they had put at their last meeting with the deputation. Sir John Clotworthy assured Lambert that in Ireland they should all be under the command of the popular Major-General Skippon; but then he added the unpopular name of the Presbyterian Massey. Colonel Hammond declared, that if they had good assurance that Skippon would go, he doubted not but a great part of the army would engage. To this the officers cried out, "All, all!" but others shouted still louder, "Fairfax and Cromwell—give us Fairfax and Cromwell, and we all go." After a vain attempt to gain over volunteers, the deputation returned in dismay to London. The question was adjourned from the 23rd to the 27th of April. On that day Hollis urged on his party to vote that the whole army, horse and foot, should be disbanded with all convenient speed, and six weeks' pay given upon their disbanding, and that four of the officers should be summoned by the Sergeant-at-Arms to attend at the bar of the House.

On this very day some of the officers of that army presented an energetic petition to the Commons. This paper, which was a vindication of their conduct, rather than a petition, was signed by Thomas Hammond, Lieutenant-General of the Ordnance, fourteen colonels and lieutenant-colonels, six majors, and one hundred and thirty captains, lieutenants, and other commissioned officers. "The misrepresentation of us and our harmless intentions to this honourable House," said these citizen-soldiers, "occasioning hard thoughts and expressions of your displeasure against us, we cannot but look upon as an act of most sad importance." After insisting on their right of petitioning, they said, "We hope, by being soldiers, we have not lost the capacity of subjects, nor divested ourselves thereby of our interests in the commonwealth; that in purchasing the freedom of our brethren we have not lost our own." They energetically justified their demands for money. "For the desire of our arrears," said they, "necessity, especially of our soldiers, enforced us thereunto. That we have not been mercenary, or proposed gain as our end, the speedy ending of a languishing war will testify for us, whereby the people are much eased of their taxes and daily disbursements, and decayed trade restored to a full and flourishing condition in all quarters." But before this time an entire disaffection to the Presbyterian majority had declared itself among the common soldiers; and, irritated by the late disbanding vote, and by the House not taking this petition of the officers into immediate consideration, rank and file, troopers, dragoons, and infantry, drew closer their recently-formed compact, and prepared a document of their own for the perusal of the House. They here described "a model of a military common

council, who should assemble two commissioned officers and two private soldiers out of every regiment, to consult for the good of the army." From this arrangement the superior officers stood aloof; and one, Captain Berry, a bosom friend and old companion of Cromwell's, placed himself at their head, as was generally supposed, by his direction. In fact, there is little doubt but he was the master mind which governed and directed all things. He now began to show himself as a statesman equal to the soldier.

The crisis was now hurried on. The Lords voted that the king should be brought from Hollinby to Oaklands, and a fresh treaty opened with him. The army and the Independents, who were almost one, resolved, if possible, to forestall the Presbyterians and the peers in their design.

"To London!" exclaimed Cromwell, as soon as he heard the news. "No, never shall the perjured Stuart enter the ancient capital of England but as a prisoner—a criminal brought to answer for his treasons to the people. Woe to us if we do the work of the Lord negligently. The Hand which hath sustained shall fall from us, and our names become a reproach to future ages. If, on the contrary, we persevere—fight the good fight—our name shall be great amongst men, and our monuments erected in the hearts of their children. It must be prevented."

"But how?" demanded Ireton, who was present at the council of officers.

A smile passed over the lips of his future father-in-law, as he laconically answered:

"Arrest him."

At first there was a pause. It was one of those bold strokes of policy which energetic minds alone are capable either of conceiving or executing. The possession of the person of the captive king would at once make the army not only master of his fate, but deprive the Parliament of the only support which could uphold them in their struggle with the military rulers of the day, into whose hands the power of the kingdom had already passed. Still one difficulty presented itself. Like most men trained to arms, they had an almost superstitious reverence for law, its windings and imposing forms. The question was, what power, except the Parliament, could grant a warrant for such an act?

"Warrant!" repeated the master-mind which ruled them. "When the pure faith and your future liberties are in jeopardy, is it a time to prate of warrants? What is a warrant but a piece of sheepskin, scribbled over by the penman's craft, to convey the expression of insulted justice's will—a summons to answer for crime—the appeal of the injured to those immutable laws which require no linguist to explain, or judge to execute? Our rights and our good swords are our warrant."

A murmur of approbation rose from the daring, resolute men to

whom these observations were addressed. Bold themselves, they delighted in courage in others; and the positive triumph which the act would give them over the vacillating Fairfax, whom they held in suspicion, and the Parliament, who had so ungratefully treated them, were powerful inducements. It was unanimously agreed to.

"You will defend the act?" quietly demanded Cromwell.

"With our lives—our blood," was the reply.

"I, then, will see it done. I make no compact with you; for, with such men, oaths and vain bonds are less binding than true words. In three days Charles Stuart shall be the prisoner of the army—not the Parliament."

The short council soon afterwards broke up; but, brief as it was, it decided the fate of the monarchy for years in England.

"Shall I undertake this task?" demanded Ireton, who had followed his intended father-in-law from the meeting; "thou knowest my fidelity is inseparably attached to thee."

"Say rather thy interest," replied Oliver; "thou knowest I hate the phraseology which schoolmen have invented to disguise their thoughts, freshly christening things and passions. I would have words like mirrors—made to reflect the heart, not veil it."

His companion smiled, for he could not but remember that, of the noted personages of the time, the speaker was the most remarkable for that peculiar phraseology which left the hearer in doubt of his intentions, and, like a double-edged sword, cut both ways—that his words were generally a mask used to conceal his real motives without directly denying them—and that, although a lover of truth, he frequently equivocated with it.

Cromwell observed the smile, and, for an instant, his quick sense of the ridiculous overcame his usual habit of self-command. Ireton's thoughts had been as plainly revealed to him as though he had spoken them, and he, for once, frankly replied to them:

"I combat the world with its own weapons, boy. It were the fool's wisdom to encounter cunning with simplicity, falsehood with truth, or treachery with loyalty, with men whose every word is weighed. There must be a guard upon the lips where great achievements are at stake. The best intentions must sometimes wear a mask. When all are armed, it were a folly to mingle with mankind unless armed too."

"Hast been reading Ignatius Loyola lately?" demanded Ireton, with a laugh.

"He was no fool, Papist though he was. One of his lessons I remember at this moment."

"And what was that?"

"Always to exact implicit obedience and respect from all who ranked beneath him."

Ireton was silent; he saw that the moment for familiarity was

past, and he wisely forbore to renew it; it was like playing with a lion—the paw might be as soft as velvet to the touch, but it reminded you every instant that the animal had claws.

“I am not to be intrusted with this expedition, then?” he said, with a manner which denoted more dissatisfaction than remonstrance.

“It is beneath thee. Hast never seen the gallant stag chased in the forest?”

“Often.”

“The chiefs enjoy the sport; but when run down, the menial performs the last office. Charles is at bay: another must wind the mort. That is always best done which is done quietly. Wert thou seen in this it would attract too much attention to the act, and draw men’s gaze upon me. I am content to move the puppets which play my game, and not let the world see me pull the strings. It is known thou art about to become my son-in-law, since Bridget’s maiden fancy has been smitten with that bear’s face of thine. For the future,” he added, “ask me no more reasons for my conduct—it is not often that I am disposed to give them.”

That same evening the speaker sent for one Joyce, a cornet in Whalley’s regiment. Cromwell had often noticed him for his reckless courage, extreme daring, and the implicit obedience to the orders of his superior officers. The fellow was not without ambition, but formed of the metal which tyrants work their way with—an instrument fitted for good or evil things, according to the hand which used him. His instructions were to proceed to Hollinby and arrest the king, whom he was to convey first to the mansion of the Cromwell family at Hinchinbrook. A troop of horse was to accompany him.

“Thou wilt not flinch in this?” demanded the general.

“From the fire of the enemy as soon,” replied the young man, who felt elated at the confidence reposed in him. “Death may arrest my progress, but shall not frighten me back. I am of no cur’s breed, general, and will not belie my race.”

“Be prudent as thou art faithful in this thing, and thou shalt not go unrewarded. Eyes are upon thee which watch and weigh men’s actions with no ungrateful spirit. Mount and away!”

Saluting his superior, Joyce left the tent, and in less than an hour started at the head of his party to Hollinby, where the unsuspecting king was wasting in idle negotiation and delay the moments which, employed in action, might still have saved, if not his crown and throne, at least his life. But none are so blind as those whom God hath doomed.

Hollinby House was a fine old baronial building of the Elizabethan character; in fact, the virgin queen had more than once visited it in the progresses which she delighted to make, as much to gratify her own inordinate vanity, by the adulation she received,

as to afford pleasure to her royal subjects. It was surrounded by a large chase or park, well wooded, and stocked with deer; the ground round the house being laid out in quaint old flower gardens, where the earth was raised in terraces, and adorned with balustrades and statues. At the back was a fine old bowling alley, shaded by a double row of chestnut-trees, between which the well-trimmed sward was spread like a verdant carpet. This was the captive monarch's usual place of resort during the morning, where he either amused himself at bowls, or gave audience to such visitors as were permitted to approach him; for, although treated with every outward mark of respect, he was strictly watched. It was here he was indulged in the puerile vanity of exercising the supposed hereditary gift of his race in touching for the evil. Crowds of persons affected with the fatal leprosy attended daily at first, but gradually diminished when they found the bounty of a silver crown usually given to the patients was discontinued. It is strange how soon the spirit of incredulity spread after the alteration.

"Will your majesty condescend to play?" demanded one of the gentlemen of his suit, respectfully addressing Charles as he walked in gloomy meditation under the trees, which cast a gloom almost as lowering as his fortunes.

An impatient wave of the hand was the sole response

Perhaps the captive's thoughts and feelings were removed to a far different scene—to France, his wife, and children; or, in the bitterness of regret, he compared his present state with the brilliancy of his youth and the bright promise of his earlier manhood. His attendants saw that he was moved, and kept at a respectful distance; even those who were set by the Presbyterians to watch his person followed their example; for he was affable under misfortune, and never showed more real dignity of character than when he had lost all external characteristics of the high rank he so long had occupied in the world.

A young girl, dressed in the costume of a farmer's daughter, who had been standing near the edge leaning on the arm of an aged peasant, made her way through one of the gaps which the country people had made, timidly approached the person of the king, and knelt before him, modestly removing her kerchief, as was the custom with those who came to be touched for the disease. She awaited the usual ceremony. As no chaplain of the Episcopal Church was by—and Charles acknowledged no other—he began pronouncing the usual prayer himself.

"Look at the superstitious wench!" exclaimed Colonel Hareby, one of the Presbyterian officers set over the king. "She seems to believe in the mummary. Much yet has to be done before superstition and priestcraft are rooted out of England."

"Say rather kingcraft," observed his companion.

Although displeased at the ceremony, neither of the speakers felt disposed to interfere, to prevent, or to approach to witness it ; but moodily continued their walk.

Charles, during the prayer, had closed his eyes, for he was devoutly impressed with a belief in the efficacy of the supposed miraculous gift of his race. As he approached to place his ungloved hand upon her neck, he observed that the scars were merely painted, and the apparent sores caused by artificial means. In the corner of the girl's boddy was a letter.

"From the queen, sire," whispered the girl.

Charles, recovering from his surprise, eagerly took the letter, and concealed it in his sleeve ; as he did so, their eyes met, and, despite disguise, he recognised the Lady of Stanfield, who had accompanied her husband from France to accomplish her dangerous errand. The old man upon whose arm she had been leaning was no other than the faithful Martin.

No sooner was her purpose achieved, than she rose from her knees, first replacing the kerchief, and walked back to her companion without one word—without even pressing to her lips the royal hand which loyalty and affection to her mistress prompted her to kiss. This was perhaps the severest trial during the whole adventure.

The king soon afterwards retired to his room to peruse the letter he had so unexpectedly obtained. It urged him by every tie which conjugal love could dictate to escape, and informed him of a plot then in agitation to provide him with the means. The time was to be that very night. During the rest of the day it was observed that the captive was unusually melancholy and silent.

Cleverly as the lady thought she had executed her purpose, an observant eye was upon her, the eye of her most relentless enemy, who had only relaxed his pursuit on her escape from England with the unfortunate Henrietta Maria. He had long since recovered from the wounds he received on the night of his fall from the walls of Exeter, and, like a restless spirit of evil, was watching the hour and the occasion to complete the ruin he so long had planned. The first impulse of his malignant heart was to cause her to be instantly arrested, but prudence restrained him. The letter was already in the possession of the king, and he well knew that the Presbyterians, who were so anxious to treat with him, would never so far outrage the royal dignity as to cause his person to be searched, and without the proof he would be powerless.

"No," he muttered, "it was not merely to deliver a letter that she left the sunny shores of France ; her husband, too, must be near her. Their object, doubtless, is to rescue Charles. They will linger round the net, and I shall catch them all in the same springe." With these words he called for his horse, and rode to a village a few miles distant, where Cromwell had secretly arrived

to watch the execution of the orders he had given to Joyce, and, if necessary, either from weakness on his part or resistance from the Presbyterians, to execute them himself. Their interview was brief, but satisfactory to both.

That very evening, while Charles slept, the letter, which he had not had the precaution to destroy, was cleverly abstracted from his person : its contents not only revealed the plot, but the intended manner of its execution. A smile lit the features of the leader of the Independents as he read it, and he determined by one bold blow to end the dispute between the Parliament, Charles, and the people.

Calling to him Dick of the Belt, whom gratitude had made the most faithful of his followers, he determined to put his fidelity and obedience to the test.

"I have a duty for thee," he said, gloomily, as soon as the soldier stood before him ; "perform it faithfully, and thou shalt return to thy fair bride and office in Hull, before the war is ended, enriched with worldly gifts and the consciousness of having served thy country."

"Name it, general," replied the young man, proudly ; "I hope there is danger in it, that I may prove my gratitude and fidelity to the cause and you."

"Hast ever shot a fellow-creature ?—taken the life of a being formed in the same scale of creation as thyself ?—arrested the heart in its quick beatings by the cold blow of death ?"

"Never—at least, not in cold blood. In battle I have done my duty like another."

"Mount and follow me. I will place thee opposite a window"—and here the speaker looked a second time at the letter—"of Hollinby House. Thou wilt see a false sentinel betray his watch. Stir not. Thou wilt see traitors plotting a greater traitor's escape from justice. Draw not thy breath too loud, lest it should scare them from their purpose. But when the window opens, and a man appears ready to descend—then——"

"What then ?" demanded Dick, astonished at the agitation of the speaker, which was visible in his trembling speech and the heavy drops of perspiration which stood upon his forehead.

"Level thy weapon. Let thine eye be true and thy heart strong. Strike him dead."

Dick hesitated ; the manner of Cromwell, more than the deed, alarmed him.

"Dost hesitate ?"

"No, general ; but I would, if it pleasure thee, learn what crime he has committed, and who is the man whose life must pay the forfeit by my hands."

"A traitor to his country and its liberties—a perjured traitor—England's enemy and mine."

"Enough," said the soldier with a sigh, "I'll do it."

That same night three persons stood upon the little sward of grass at the back of Hollinby House—Rupert, Herbert, and Martin. They little thought that the life of every one of them was at the mercy of a concealed sentinel, whose piece alternately covered them. All three were restless and excited; they had no assurance that Charles would consent to the entreaties of his queen, and escape from the hands of his enemies; still they were faithful to the hope which brought them there.

"Thank Heaven," whispered Rupert, "the sentinel beneath the terrace is changed at last. Our friend is at his post."

No sooner had the relief passed on its way than the disguised Royalist who had been placed on duty made signals with his arms to invite them to approach; which they carefully did.

"Have you heard anything?" demanded the impatient prince.

"His majesty consents," said the gentleman, who, to serve his king, had changed his name and rank to enlist in one of the Presbyterian regiments. "He twice raised his hat at supper."

This was the signal agreed upon in the letter.

Presently the window was cautiously opened, and the monarch, who had contrived to leave his chamber, appeared in the dress of a simple officer. But he was still wavering and irresolute.

"'Tis he!" whispered a stern voice to Dick. "Now is the time."

"For Heaven's sake lose not a moment, sir!" exclaimed Rupert. "Descend at once."

"Fire!" hoarsely exclaimed Cromwell.

The hand of Dick was on the matchlock, when a female, who had been silently watching the whole proceedings from an adjoining copse, rushed forward and dashed aside his arm. The piece went off, but the aim was hurtless.

"Traitor!" she shrieked, "would you slay your king?"

"The king!" repeated the bewildered soldier. "I knew not that—I knew not that!"

He turned to reproach his general with the attempt to turn him into an assassin, to cover his name with infamy. But it was too late—Cromwell had disappeared.

The alarm created by the explosion caused the guard to return. Charles retired, dispirited and hopeless, to his chamber. His friends were surrounded and disarmed.

"Hold!" said a superior officer, a well-known confidant of Cromwell's, who appeared upon the spot; "harm not your prisoners. To London with them! Here is the warrant for their committal to the Gate House."

"And the woman?" added the subaltern, pointing to Mary.

"She is my prize," said Barford, who suddenly approached. "Here is an order for her delivery to my care."

The Lady of Stanfield fainted, and was borne from the place in the arms of her triumphant enemy.

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